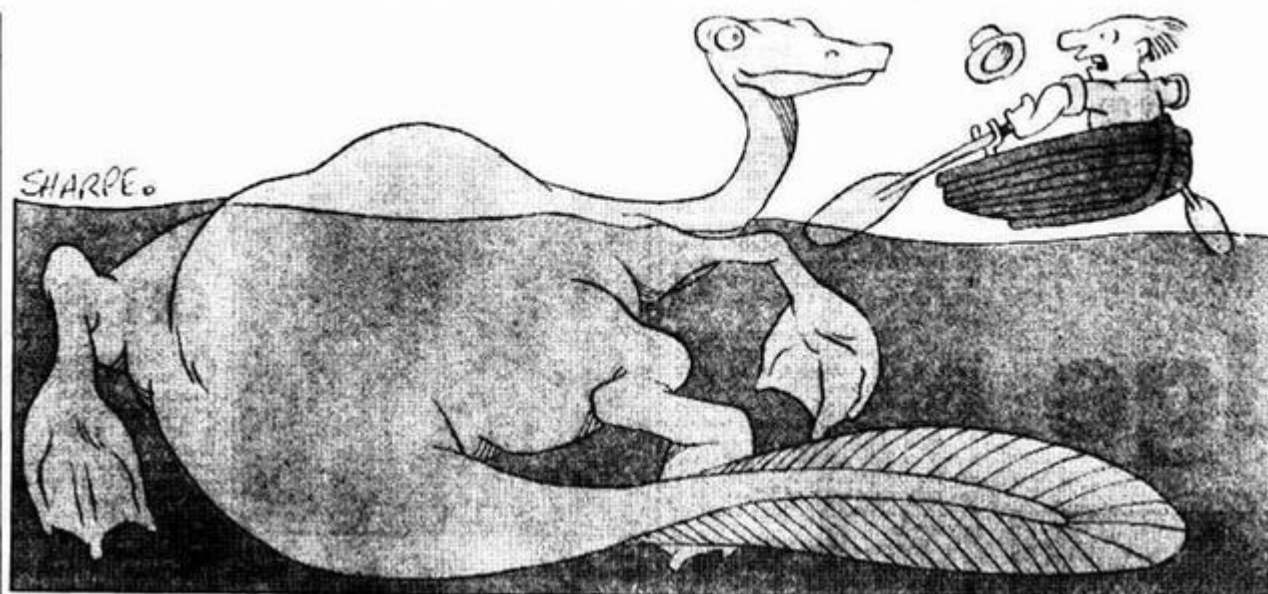




Do dinosaurs still live? Hundreds will say yes

By PAUL SHAW

IN THIS high-tech age of telescopic cameras, infra-red night-scopes, satellites, aerial surveys and sophisticated sonar, surely it isn't possible for any large, mysterious creatures to remain undetected? Surely dinosaur-like creatures cannot exist anyway? But it is highly likely that they do!

Strange monsters inhabit numerous lakes throughout the world — and not just Loch Ness. Unknown beasts have been seen at sea — are these sea-serpents? Do brontosaurus still exist in Africa? Is it possible that pterodactyls still fly our skies?

The "monster of the lake" is probably the most witnessed and photographed of all unknown phenomena in our time. Most people who have seen such creatures are highly respectable. Surely not all of them were seeing things?

In Lake Champlain in America there is a monster named Champ — at least 91 people will tell you this is so. It has been described as having a long neck, a rather serpentine body up to 9 metres long, and darkish skin. Champ scared the daylights out of a New York high-society steamboat excursion in the 1870s when it surfaced nearby. The famous showman,

P. T. Barnum, even put a \$50,000 price on Champ's carcass.

More recently, two skin-divers, Morris Lucia and Fred Shanafelt, were diving in Maguam Bay on Lake Champlain searching for a sunken cabin cruiser when Lucia unexpectedly gestured for his partner to surface. Shanafelt, thinking there was some danger, surfaced with Lucia and, looking round, saw what had given Lucia such a scare. A huge monster, mushroom grey and at least 12 metres long, was swimming right beside them!

Lucia said later: "It didn't make any effort to harm us. Once it cocked its head as if curious about our appearance. I think we could have gone right back into the water without being hurt. Of course I wouldn't have done that for a million dollars!"

Manipogo is the name given to the monster sighted in the Canadian lakes of Winnipegosis and Manitoba. It has always been described as being slate grey with humps and a horn sticking out of its flat, snake-like head.

When Manipogo rose in front of a large group of picnickers at Manitoba Park on the lake shore in 1960 there was instant, if hilarious, pandemonium. Grabbing her camera, one woman rushed to the water's edge and promptly fell in! Another woman, camera in hand, rushed to her husband — but forgot to

...the woman, camera in hand, rushed to her husband — but forgot to take a picture first. The designer of the park, Tom Lake, who had a cine camera with him at the time, calmly and coolly filmed the monster until it submerged. Then he discovered there was no film in the camera! Mr A. R. Adams chased the creature along the shore and saw it joined by a mate and a baby monster.

Steve Rehaluk, his wife and two children all got a good view too: "We were sitting at a picnic table. There was a ripple in the water. When I first looked there was only one. But when I ran to the shore I could see another beside it and a third trailing behind." He thought they looked like three black snakes. All in all, 17 people observed Manipogo and family that day — but no one got a picture.

In Lake Okanagan in Western Canada there is yet another monster: Ogopogo, its name being derived from a music-hall song.

In 1977, Mrs Lillian Vogelgesang got a terrifying shock when her little daughter, playing by the lake shore, began screaming. Mrs Vogelgesang saw a 15-metre-long creature twisting and thrashing, water frothing round its humps, chasing fish close by the shore. It was olive-green in colour with a glistening smooth skin and what looked like flippers.

ON ANOTHER occasion, Erin Neely was water-skiing on the lake when something dark and huge rushed past her, upsetting her from her skis. She said the creature was only an arm's length away while she trod water. When brought to shore she was taken to hospital for shock treatment.

There's even a monster in Japan's Lake Ikeda. It had been described as vast and having two widely spaced humps. Issie, as the monster is called, has even had a special observatory built in its honour. Enthusiastic Issie supporters once poured sake into the lake, hoping that Issie would become tipsy and come to the surface to frolic!

Of course the most famous of all the lake monsters is Nessie of Loch Ness, who has the distinction of having been sighted by more than 3000 people. Nessie has been filmed, photographed, subjected to sonar scans and submarines and has scared divers and fishermen but has still remained mysterious and illusive.

Loch Ness in Northern Scotland is 39 kilometres long and up to 300 metres deep. Bordered by sheer mountains on one side, Loch Ness is an eerie and forbidding place, its waters constantly dark and murky.

The first photograph of Nessie was taken in 1933 by Hugh Gray, a worker at

the local British Aluminium Company. It was a Sunday after church when Gray took his usual walk along the loch. "The loch was like a mill pond and the sun was shining brightly. An object of considerable dimensions rose out of the water not so very far from where I was. I immediately got my camera ready and snapped the object, which was then 2 to 3 feet above the surface of the water."

A previously unreported encounter took place on July 22, 1933. Mr and Mrs George Spicer, on holiday in Scotland, were driving along a narrow road that ran beside the loch when they were suddenly confronted by an awesome sight.

A 9-metre, bulky, greyish creature with a 3.6-metre-long neck came crashing out of the bracken on the hillside! Moving ponderously across the road, it plunged into the loch and disappeared.

During that year a flurry of sightings took place. The monster's description, though varied, always consisted of two humps, a long tail and a snake-like head and neck that was usually seen protruding from the water.

All these sightings brought world-wide publicity and floods of reporters, monster hunters, sightseers and researchers to the loch. In well over half a century that flood has never really abated.

Are all these lake monsters a type of surviving dinosaur? The most common theory is that Nessie and friends are plesiosaurs, a giant fish-eating reptile supposed to have become extinct 70 million years ago. Skeleton reconstructions of fossil plesiosaurs certainly fit many of the lake monsters' descriptions.

Others believe that these lake monsters are giant eels or a race of monster worm-like amphibious creatures called *Typhlonectidae*. Then again there's the

Wildlife Department officials declared the creature rare and endangered

notion that the lake monsters are a species of giant salamander and that Nessie is a type of huge, shell-less snail!

Carl Hagenbeck, the great Hamburg Zoo collector, heard many stories from explorers and natives of huge creatures, "half-elephant, half-dragon", existing in the swamps of Africa. An expedition to Zambia discovered cave drawings depicting a giant sauropod dinosaur called the brontosaurus, or, as it is now more correctly called, the apatosaurus.

Other reports of such creatures in Central Africa followed. The natives described a monster to Captain Freiherr von Stein, who was preparing a survey of the German colony there. The natives told of a creature the size of an elephant with a long neck that could bend like a giraffe's and a crocodile-like tail. They called it the *mokele-mbembe* and said it was dangerous because, although it ate only plants and lived quietly in caves by the water's edge, it sometimes overturned native canoes and drowned the occupants.

IN 1976 James Powell, studying crocodiles in Gabon, heard stories of a dinosaur-like monster called *n'yamala* by the natives. Powell investigated. A witch-doctor questioned about the monster was shown various illustrations of large animals. He pointed to a picture of the dinosaur called the diplodocus and said, "N'yamala."

Encouraged, Powell launched an expedition into the Congo in 1980 to question pygmies who have seen and described these dinosaur-like creatures. The expedition was headed by Professor Roy Mackal of the Chicago University. Questioning the pygmies, Mackal learnt that





An artist's impression of a pterosaur: subject of a 1948 US sighting?

the creatures were around 9 metres in length and reddish in colour and that there were very few of them. The creatures were said to hibernate during the dry season in caves.

The expedition failed to sight any of the creatures that time and another expedition took place the next year. Again sightings didn't occur, though a native guide pointed to an area of vegetation by the lake side that had been flattened. It appeared to have been caused by a large animal with a long tail.

Yet another expedition in 1981 found progress hampered by the wet season and the condition of the swamps. Several brief sightings of a long neck above the water were recorded, but the cameras failed to work in the extremely damp conditions. The new expedition leader, Herman Regusters, and his wife, did hear a strange animal call and the crashing of some huge creature through the jungle close by the lake.

In 1983 a Congolese expedition visited the Lake Telle area during better weather conditions. Shortly after their arrival, team members observed a large brownish-black creature in the water. Its head was relatively small and supported by a long neck. This sighting was filmed, but the camera setting was wrong so the resulting pictures were useless.

It is highly likely that the *mokele-mbembe* may be in fact left over from the dinosaur age. The liana plant, which the *mokele-mbembe* is said to feed on, forms part of a group of plants that were widespread during the Cretaceous Period, which was a time when dinosaurs roamed the earth. The Congo environment has changed very little since that time.

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If dinosaurs still inhabit lakes then surely some of them still dwell in the unknown depths of the sea? In the North Atlantic in 1959, two Scotsmen had a vivid sighting off the Isle of Soay. One of the men was Tex Geddes, the other a holidaying engineer inspector, James Gavin. While fishing mackerel one fine day, Gavin noticed a strange black shape a couple of kilometres away. The object appeared to be getting closer all the time.

"I'm afraid we both stared in amazement as the object came towards us," explained Geddes afterwards, "for this beast steaming slowly in our direction was like some hellish monster of prehistoric times. The head was definitely reptilian, about 2½ feet (75cm) high with large protruding eyes. I would say we saw 8-10 feet (2½-3m) of the back in the water."

A similar strange creature dramatically appeared in the middle of U-boat action. U-boat U28, under the command of Captain Georg von Forstner, had just sunk a British cargo steamer. The steamer sank quietly; then there was a violent underwater explosion, followed by pieces of wreckage and a writhing, struggling gigantic sea animal erupting out of the water. Von Forstner described the creature as being "like a crocodile in shape. It had four limbs with powerful webbed feet and a long tail tapering to a point."

Even Australia can boast its own "sea-serpent". In December 1964, a Frenchman named Robert Le Serrac, who lived on Hood Island, in Queensland, was taking his family across Stonehaven Bay in a small motor cruiser. They

land, was taking his family across Stonehaven Bay in a small motor cruiser. They came across what looked like a floating tree. As they approached it, Le Serrac observed that it was a vast eel-like body.

Hastily he took his family back to shore. Then, accompanied by a diver named Hank de Jong, Le Serrac went back to where he had seen the injured monster which he hoped to film. The creature had a huge head and a large mouth crammed with small teeth. Its body had no scales, had a pointed tail and was some 21 meters in length. The creature had a gaping wound in its side and had probably come into the shallow waters of the bay to escape sharks. As Le Serrac was filming the creature it slowly slid off into deeper water.

Way back in 1890, a school teacher named Miss Lovell reported seeing off the Queensland coast a creature half turtle and half fish and some 9 metres in length. The local Aborigines had always known of such a creature and called it a "mohamoha".

The oceans cover at least two-thirds of the world's surface and their depths are some of the least explored areas in the world. There have been numerous sightings and collected evidence supporting the existence of giant squid and octopi, as well as the sea-serpent, so it is also possible that dinosaur-like creatures lurk in the oceans. Stranger things have happened at sea!

WHILE the dense jungles and deep lakes and oceans might provide undisturbed homes for large, strange beasts, surely no such cover is available in the sky? It might seem impossible that any giant flying creatures could remain undetected, but there is no shortage of mysterious sightings.

In 1948 in Illinois, in the United States, a bird-like monster with a monstrous beak was sighted from the air and on the ground by a number of reputable witnesses, among them a doctor, an army colonel and a policeman. They estimated the monster's incredible wing span to compare with a small plane.

This bird-like monster fitted the description of a pterosaur, or pterodactyl as it is most commonly known, a flying dinosaur supposed to have died out 180 million years ago.

Another encounter with Big Bird, as it came to be called, occurred in May 1961, when a businessman claimed that a pterodactyl had glided close by his plane.

A teacher at a Texas rural school had the scare of her life in February 1978. She was driving along a country road when she suddenly saw a pterodactyl diving at

was driving along a country road when she suddenly saw a pterodactyl diving at her car. A vast shadow splayed across the width of the road. She saw another similar creature gliding nearby.

Two other teachers also reported seeing the flying reptile that day. Again the beast had swooped low over their cars. One of the teachers said to reporters: "It was the biggest thing I've ever seen alive. It's just unreal. I don't know how it could have survived all those millions of years and still be flying around here. It happened so fast and it was such a shock you think you're seeing things."

A Texas radio station offered a \$1000 reward for the capture of Big Bird, and a wealthy oil man said he'd give another \$5000. Soon excited hunters were scouring the countryside, hoping for a glimpse of the bird and the chance to take a pot shot at it. No one got the reward — and never would. Wildlife Department officials announced the creature, whatever it might be, as rare and endangered. Anyone trying to kill such a creature would be jailed.

Consistent reports of pterodactyl-like creatures have come from Africa too. As in Texas, a number of pterodactyl fossils have been discovered there. Both African natives and American Indians have legends of "flying dragons".

IN THE Congo, natives told explorer Frank Melland of a pterodactyl-like creature they called "Kongamato", which was supposed to live in the dense impenetrable Juinda swamp area. Melland showed the natives drawings of pterosaurs. They identified those as having the likeness of Kongamato. They described Kongamato as having a 2.1 metre wingspan, no feathers and teeth in its large beak.

Could so many people who have claimed they have seen sea monsters, brontosauruses, pterodactyls and lake creatures like the Loch Ness Monster be wrong? It is true that a number of recorded sightings are due to mistaken natural phenomena or hoaxes, like the one where a Yorkshire zoo owner managed to fool everyone for a day or so into believing that one of his dead elephant seals was a basking Nessie. But the overwhelming statistics of sightings, collated with what evidence there is, point strongly to the fact that strange creatures, possibly remnants from the dinosaur age, inhabit the unplumbed depths of lakes and oceans and unexplored wastes of the earth.

Until recently, only a small number of scientists and zoologists were inclined to be involved in proving the authenticity of these mysterious creatures. Now full-scale expeditions armed with the most modern equipment are occurring. If these continue and persevere, it may not

most modern equipment are occurring. If these continue and persevere, it may not be too long before we know for sure that some dinosaurs do exist!